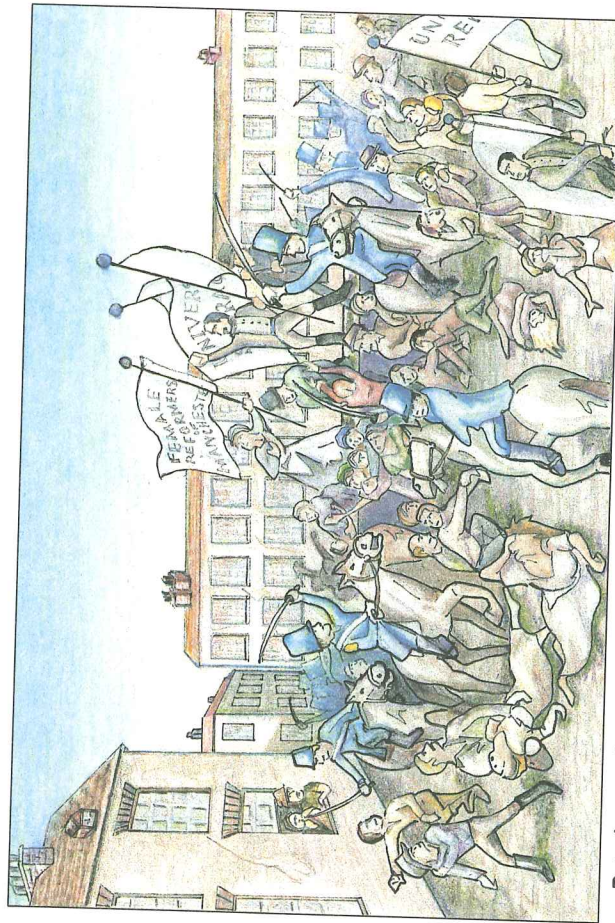


89 Social Effects of the Industrial Revolution in Britain 1800 - 1850

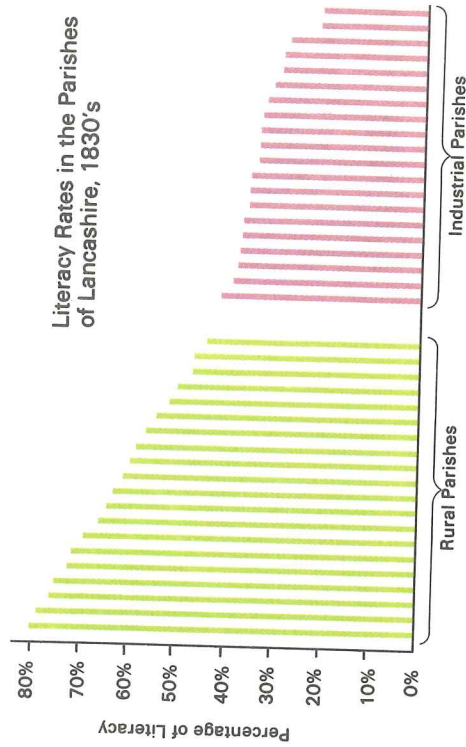
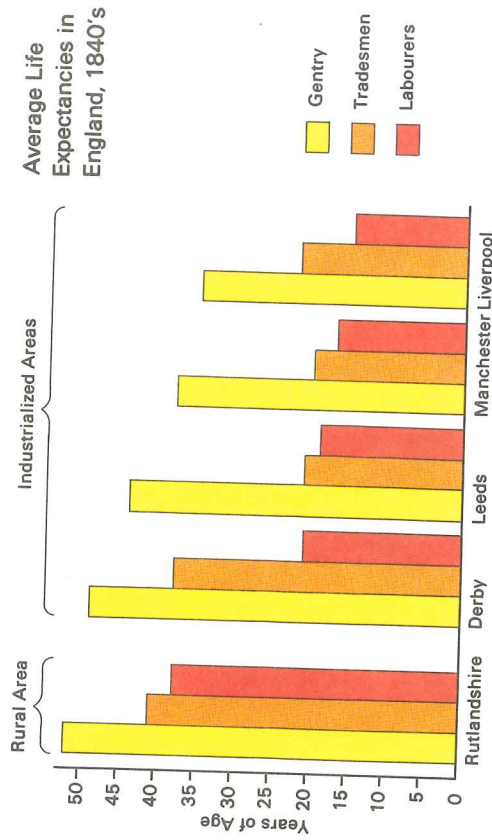
In the early nineteenth century, Britain became the first country to experience the shock of industrialization. It was poorly prepared to deal with it. Industrial workers laboured in conditions of noise, dust, noxious fumes and heat. Many worked in danger of sudden death from an explosion, the collapse of a mine shaft, or entanglement in the moving parts of a machine. Hours of work were long. Part-time workers and the unemployed lived in squalor and poverty. The chart of life expectancies in different parts of England shows very clearly one of the major impacts of industrialization.

Literacy rates in the County of Lancashire tell another part of the story. Literacy had improved generally in Lancashire until the late 1700's, but thereafter it fell sharply in the cotton towns and did not recover until the 1840's. The differences, shown in the graph to the right, between literacy in the rural parishes and the new industrial parishes stand out, even though most were only a few miles apart. Clearly, the early age at which children began work and the long hours spent in the mills prevented them from getting any schooling.

From the 1820's onwards, organized public opinion became a powerful force. People from the middle and working classes sought reform and their views were expressed in public demonstrations and in an increasingly influential press.



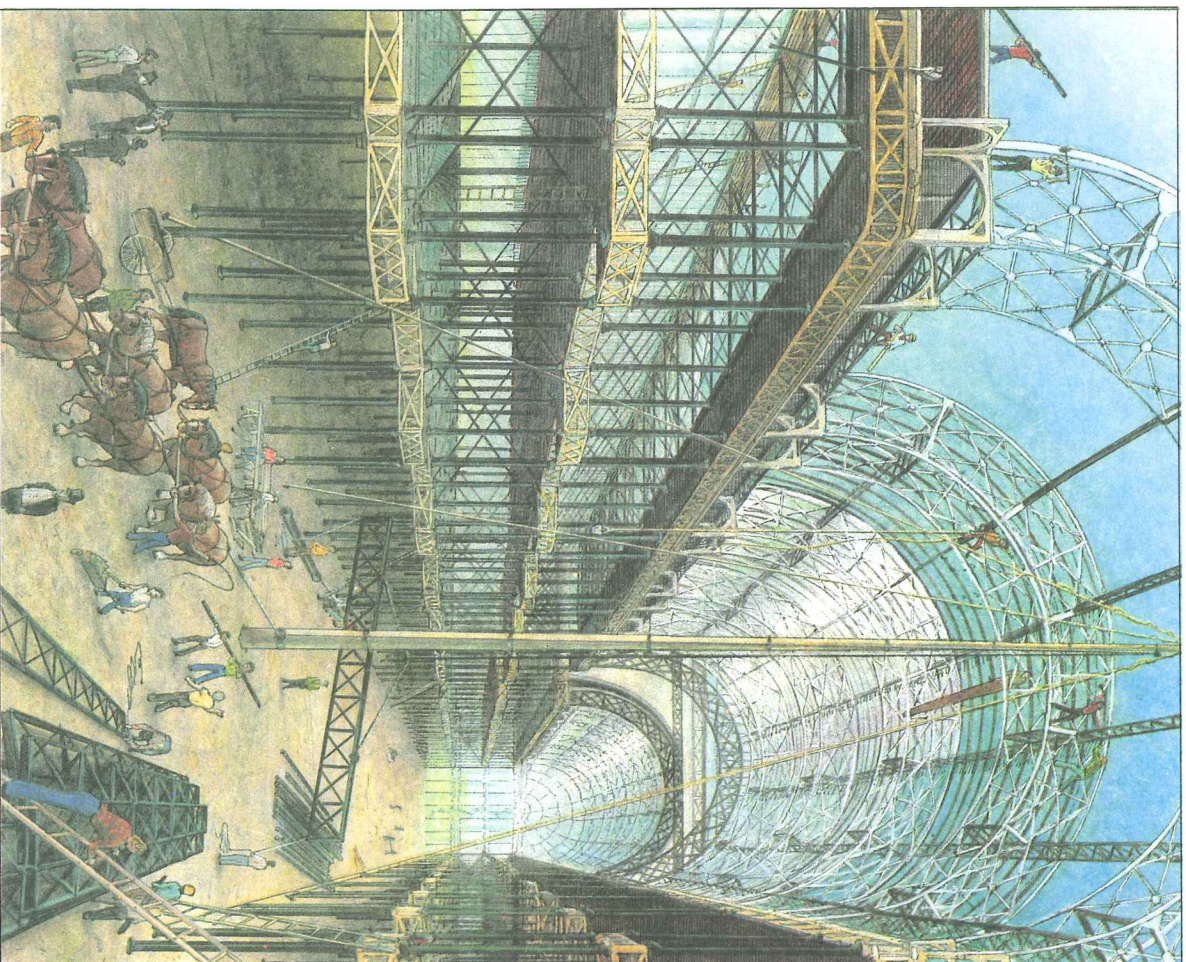
Peterloo — August 16, 1819: Cavalry troopers charge a public meeting held in support of Parliamentary Reform in St. Peter's Fields, Manchester.



These changes caused people to think about the society in which they lived as a system of "classes" distinguished from each other by economic circumstance. The diagram below shows how historians today try to represent the main divisions in nineteenth-century society.

Gentry	Upper Class	Aristocracy and landed gentry
	Upper Middle	Rich merchants and ambitious industrialists
Tradesmen	The Professions	Lawyers, doctors, architects ("landless" gentlemen)
	Lower Middle	Small merchants, tradesmen, clerks
Labourers	Working Class	Factory workers, domestic system workers
		Agricultural workers, domestic servants, casual labourers

The Great Exhibition of 1851 celebrated a new sense of optimism and pride in Britain's position as "Workshop of the World." This was expressed in the Crystal Palace which housed the exhibition. By its bold use of glass and iron in new structural forms, the Palace captured the spirit of a new age. It is shown here under construction. What does the use of a horse team to raise a prefabricated iron cross-beam suggest about the combination of old and new in mid-nineteenth century Britain?



Crystal Palace under construction

Social Conditions Improve 1850-1901 90

For the first time, more people lived in towns than in the country. By 1900 nearly eighty percent lived in cities of 100 000 or more, and life changed in many ways. The landed upper class still held great power, but increasingly had to share it with political leaders whose power came from voters in the towns and cities. Though many problems remained, major steps were taken to remedy the evils of earlier years. City leaders began to improve living conditions, and such amenities as parks and libraries were provided. After 1870 elementary education was made mandatory across Britain. How would this have improved the opportunities for many to have a better life?



Inventions like the telephone and typewriter offered women a wider choice of work and the chance of greater independence.

Despite all the new opportunities offered by industrial progress, people's lives continued to vary greatly. For the middle classes and above, life was certainly comfortable. For many in the working classes, life still centred on employment in the factories and the "sweated trades."

Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, more people were sharing in the wealth produced by industrialism. Food was cheaper and more varied than before. The lower cost of food meant that families had more money for other things. This fact was reflected in the rapid growth of retail trade. Many more people than before could now look forward to a shopping expedition as a social pleasure. Many were able to take holidays and seaside resorts became popular. Organized sport provided popular and inexpensive entertainment for millions. We take such things for granted, but they are, as much as mechanization and technology, the consequences of the Industrial Revolution.